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Women managing women: A good idea?

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ABSTRACT

As women continue to move into the workplace and into managerial positions, the wage gap for female employees is not improving. In this study, we examine the effect of having a female manager on the wages and hierarchical growth of female employees. Findings suggest that female employees may be better served by working for male managers.

Much research has been conducted on women's hierarchical movement in organizations, such as the focus on the glass ceiling as a persistent and invisible barrier to their advancement (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001; Hultin, 2003; Wright & Baxter, 2000), yet as women have broken through the glass ceiling and advanced into management roles, the question of their part in the reduction of pay inequity has not received the attention it deserves (Hultin & Szulkin, 1999; Hultin & Szulkin, 2003).

The reasons behind barriers to women's advancement have been the subject of debate, and one pervasive argument is that of men in powerful positions prevent the movement of women into powerful positions (Strober, 1984; Kanter, 1977). Kanter (1977), in her seminal work on organizations suggested that a desire for minimal ambiguity in social situations leads individuals to prefer to be around people who are like them, and Pfeffer (1983) suggested that the demographic make up of the organization influences decisions such as promotions.

Similarity in demographic characteristics has been found in research to be beneficial to the subordinate (Roth, 2004; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989), to the work team (Jackson, Brett, Sessa, Cooper, Jlin & Peyronnin, 1991; O'Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989), to the organization (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992), and in mentoring relationships (Burke, 1984; Kammayer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Lester, Hannah, Harms, Vogelgesang, & Avolio, 2011). Individuals may perceive familiarity with regard to those who truly are similar to them, to those who are perceived to be like them, or to both (Dalessio & Imada, 1984; Pulakos & Wexley, 1983; Rand & Wexley, 1975) with characteristics such as race and gender being easily identifiable commonalities.

In considering the same vs. opposite-sex mentoring relationships, some research suggests that women should choose other women as mentors (Clawson & Kram, 1984; Noe, 1988; Parker & Kram, 1993). Burke and McKeen (1997), however, found that the same-gender mentoring relationship isn't always beneficial to the organization or the female protégés. Women with female mentors as compared to women with male mentors had greater intention to quit (Burke & McKeen, 1995), be in lower level managerial positions, and earn lower salaries (due to being in lower-levels in the organization). The researchers suggested that this was likely the case because the female mentors had less organizational power and resources.

In contrast to the similar-to-me hypothesis, research on outcomes for female mentors suggests a large potential downside to engaging in this relationship. Mentoring is a visible activity, and the female-female mentoring relationship may be the most visible—and therefore potentially the most costly—of the mentoring relationships (Kanter, 1977; Noe, 1988; Ragins, 1989).

In light of the above stated issues and variations regarding the results of research focusing on women interacting and managing one another while in differing levels in the organizational hierarchy, the present research was designed and conducted in an attempt to bring some clarity to the issue of whether women in positions of power bring

benefit to the women subordinates they manage. As women make strides into the workplace and into positions of management (Jacobs, 1992), assuming perceived similarity on the basis of gender, the logical outcome would be that women would benefit from having a female manager, mentor, or simply from having women in positions of power in an organization. In line with this thinking, the following hypotheses were developed.

Hypothesis 1: When women have female managers they will have higher salaries.

Hypothesis 2: When women have female managers they will have higher salary growth.

Hypothesis 3: When women have female managers they will achieve higher hierarchical levels in the organization.

Hypothesis 4: When women have female managers they will have higher hierarchical growth within the organization.

Method

In order to test our 4 hypotheses, data were collected from 612 manager/non-manager dyads where in all cases the non-manager (protégé) was female. Participants were from a very large Fortune 500 manufacturing firm located in the Pacific Northwest portion of the United States. Participants were from 4 different business units in 11 locations with an average age of 46.21 years (s.d. 9.7 years) and tenure of 16.20 years (s.d. 8.44 years). There were 8 total levels in the organization from entry level (level 1) to director or higher including vice presidents. In this study all 8 levels were represented. Outcome variables of an archival nature were obtained from the company as part of official company records and are generally considered to be objective, reliable and valid measures. Organizational level within the organization was measured by the level of the employee from entry (level 1) to executive vice president (level 8). Level growth rate was calculated by dividing organizational level by the respective employee's age. This method of assessing level growth has been successfully used in previous research (Luthans, Rosenkrantz et al. 1985; Luthans 1988). This measure considers employees who have reached VP level by age 30 to have a faster organizational level growth rate than those who did not attain VP level until age 40. Salary was measured as the yearly salary on record with the organization. For those employees receiving an hourly rate, we calculated their annual salary by multiplying the hourly rate x 2080 hours in a standard work year (40 hour weeks, 52 weeks). Salary growth rate was calculated as the percentage of growth in salary over the most recent 5-year period. In those circumstances where employee tenure was less than 5 years, the total salary growth over the amount of years of service was calculated.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations and correlations

	Mean (S.D.)	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Gender Congruence					
2. Salary	62,108	-.04			
3. Five Year Salary Growth	21.7	-.06	.29*		
4. Level	3.54	.08*	.49*	-.01	
5. Level Growth Index	7.79	.03	.48*	.16*	.87*

N = 612

* p < .05

Results

Means, standard deviations and bivariate correlations can be seen in Table 1. As seen, gender congruence had a non-significant relationship with employee salary and a significant relationship with employee organizational level, yet there is no relationship with level growth rate suggesting that while having a female manager may be beneficial in terms of a female employee's organizational level, the rate at which the employee is rising the corporate hierarchy is not correlated with her manager's gender, contrary to Hypothesis 4.

In order to test hypotheses, a series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) was completed to understand the mean differences between the groups. Results can be seen in Table 2. Hypothesis 1 suggested gender congruence in the manager/non-manager dyad would be positively related to the female employee's salary. This hypothesis was not significant (M1 = 60957, M2 = 62518, F = 1.06, p = .30). Results suggested it was better for a female employee's salary to have a male supervisor. Hypothesis 2 suggested gender congruence in the manager/non-manager dyad would be positively related to female employee salary growth. This hypothesis was not significant (M1 = 19.60, M2 = 22.43, F = 1.97, p = .16). Again, results suggested it was better for a female employee's salary growth to have a male supervisor although this relationship was not significant.

Table 2

Mean Differences by Gender Congruence

	Gender congruence in the manager/non- manager dyad	Gender incongruence in the manager/non- manager dyad	F value	P value	Hypothesis Supported?
Salary	60957	62518	1.06	.30	No
Salary Growth	19.60	22.43	1.97	.16	No
Level	3.71	3.48	3.41	.05	Yes
Level Growth	7.92	7.74	.43	.51	No

Hypothesis 3 suggested gender congruence in the manager/non-manager dyad would be positively related to female employee hierarchical level. This hypothesis was significant ($M1 = 3.71$, $M2 = 3.48$, $F = 3.41$, $p = .05$) based on traditional cutoffs whereas p was exactly $.05$. Women with female mentors were at higher levels in the organization's hierarchy than were women with male mentors. Hypothesis 4 suggested gender congruence in the manager-subordinate dyad would be positively related to a female employee's level of hierarchical growth. This hypothesis was not supported ($M1 = 7.92$, $M2 = 7.74$, $F = .43$, $p = .51$), though it was in the predicted direction.

Post Hoc Analysis

As a post hoc analysis, we examined the role that age may play in these relationships. Babcock and Laschever (2008) suggest that women, in failing to negotiate or negotiate firmly, will experience salaries that are approximately 8% lower than their male counterparts. If a manager failed to negotiate, as a role model for her employee (Ragins & Scandura, 1994), we would expect she would not encourage her employee to negotiate for a higher salary, and this failure to negotiate is more pronounced for younger women (Babcock & Laschever, 2008). Therefore participants were separated into two data groups: above age 40 and below age 40. Age 40 was the selected grouping (rather than a median or mean split) as the Age Discrimination in Employment Act in the United States implicitly suggested working adults over the age of 40 receive more discrimination than those under 40. The results were the same for organizational level and level growth yet for salary and salary growth they were exacerbated. In the older employee group, women with a female supervisor earned, on average \$3100, less than their female counterparts with a male supervisor. In the younger employee group, however, this amount increased to a \$4000 deficit, suggesting that women are not helping one another. In addition the salary growth deficit increased from 4% in the older group to 6% in the younger group. Overall, results from the post hoc analysis suggested that younger women with female supervisors were the least served in terms of salary.

Discussion

This paper sought to test previous theorizing suggesting that men were the major barrier to women's salaries and career advancement. Previous theory suggested women would be better served by having a mentor or manager who was also a woman (Clawson & Kram, 1984; Noe, 1988; Parker & Kram, 1993), yet the research is conflicting with some results suggesting it is better and other results suggesting more negative outcomes for gender congruence. This paper looked at managers, and hypothesized that women would be better served by having a female manager than they would having a male manager. Hypothesis 1 suggested that with a female mentor, women would experience higher salaries, and Hypothesis 2 stated that women would experience higher salary growth. Both these hypotheses failed to reach significance. Hypotheses 3 and 4 looked into hierarchical level in the organization and the impact that a female or male manager would have on a woman's progression in the organization. Hypothesis 3 was supported. Counter to previous research, having a female mentor

was found to positively impact a woman's hierarchical level in the organization (Burke & McKeen, 1995, 1996). Hypothesis 4, suggested that a female mentor would positively impact how quickly the female employee moves up the hierarchical level. It was not supported, yet relationship was in the appropriate direction.

To more clearly tease out the influence on pay level of women with female managers, we conducted post-hoc analyses to look into the actual salary differences women with female managers' experience. Women over the age of 40 were impacted, though not as dramatically as women under the age of 40. Starting salary is the base upon which a woman's subsequent raises build, and this is potentially quite damaging to women's salary growth when considering straight cost of living increases coupled with the lack of opportunity to invest the additional funds (Babcock & Laschever, 2008).

Limitations

This paper looked into the possibility that women in positions of power would rectify past inequities by promoting and paying their female employees more rapidly than a male manager would. It is possible that these women felt particularly vulnerable for their own status and position. If male managers promoted the female managers, the female managers may have sought to be more gender neutral rather than favor other women. We do not know who promoted the female managers, and thus, we cannot know if the original women promoted by men were promoted from such low positions and paid so little that, over time, they actually were raising salaries and increasing the rate of promotion. In essence, a limitation to this study is in not having longitudinal data to tease out the progression of women over time.

Implications

The implications for management are both positive and negative. On the one hand, having women move up the organizational hierarchy without the requisite pay increase does save the company money. On the other hand, as women learn that their same-sex managers are not helping them, they may transfer to an opposite-sex manager. The disappointment with the same-sex mentoring relationship creates an argument for fewer women in positions of power within the hierarchy, thus countering any diversity programs the organization has implemented, and gender diversity has been found to be beneficial to organizational functioning and the organization's financial bottom line (Catalyst, 2004).

Conclusion

Mentoring has been extensively studied as a beneficial relationship for both the mentor and the mentee in organizational settings, and this study sought to tease out the conflicting findings in the extant research. The findings and post-hoc analysis revealed a disturbing trend for women with female managers. Women with female managers earn less than women with male managers, and for younger women, the disparity is even greater than their older counterparts. Should this trend continue, as women in

higher levels of organizations take on same-sex mentees, wage levels for women could drop.

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